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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 0868

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0101

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1672

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5904

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2033

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0154

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 7205

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002723

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM TH

SUBJECT: LET,S PLAY TWO: THAILAND HOSTS ASEAN+6 SUMMIT  
RERUN, FEATURING CIVIL SOCIETY, REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

REF: A. BANGKOK 2208 (AICHR)

1B. BANGKOK 517 (14TH ASEAN SUMMIT)

1C. BANGKOK 505 (ASEAN CIVIL SOCIETY CONFLICT)

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Classified By: CDA James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (C) Thailand successfully hosted the 15th ASEAN Summit, as well as the follow-on ASEAN 3 and East Asian Summits, October 23-25. The meetings took place without incident and represented a face saving victory of sorts for a government still struggling to distance itself from the stain associated with the "red-shirt" disturbances that disrupted the Pattaya Summit April 10-12. The results of the summit meeting were mixed, however. The positive highlight may have been Japan's launching of an East Asian Community concept proposal, along with the formal launching of the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The lowlight was disarray surrounding a civil society "Interface meeting," in which five PMs refused to meet representatives of their countries chosen by activists, and three of the remaining five civil society reps walked out in protest. In addition, Thai PM Abhisit was not able to hide completely from his day-to-day domestic struggles, thanks to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who inserted himself into Thailand's tempestuous political debate on October 23 when he announced that the Cambodian government would welcome fugitive ex-Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra as a resident economic advisor. Finally Summit statements on Burma backed away from ASEAN calls for the release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, made earlier in 2009, in favor of vaguer formulations calling for an inclusive process leading to 2010 elections.

12. (C) Comment: Thailand tried to place civil society engagement at the center of its 18 month Chairmanship of ASEAN, with mixed results, in part because it remained distracted by its own protracted political drama, including street protests by both sides of the political spectrum - a civil society activism frowned on by many members in the bloc. With Vietnam, Brunei, and Cambodia slated to chair

ASEAN the next three years, it is unclear how much forward progress will be made on human rights/civil society in the near future. Meanwhile, Japan's reinvigoration of the regional architecture discussion serves as a reminder that if ASEAN does not continue to transition to a more effective grouping, it risks losing relevancy in the greater Asian context. End Summary and Comment.

#### JAPAN INITIATES EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

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**¶3.** (C) On October 25, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama pitched the general concept of the East Asian Community (EAC) to the ASEAN 6 gathering, also known as the East Asian Summit (EAS). In so doing, Hatoyama stressed that the U.S.-Japanese alliance would still serve as the backbone of Japan's foreign policy, and made clear the concept was open to other countries outside East Asia, a reference all took to mean the U.S. According to Thai MFA ASEAN Department Counselor Suriya Chindawongse, Hatoyama argued that the EAC -- with precise membership to be fleshed out later -- would re-invigorate trade and economic cooperation in the region.

**¶4.** (SBU) Kavi Chongkittavorn, Thailand's leading foreign policy op-ed writer, told us October 26 that the EAC discussion should be seen as a success story for the summit, and for the U.S. as well, since all participants endorsed the potential U.S. involvement, in contrast to the Mahathir-driven exclusionary approach of the 1990s. Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) at Chulalongkorn University, in contrast characterized Hatoyama's proposal to us as a pipedream that would never be realized. Coupled with

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Australian PM Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community (APC) proposal (also discussed at the Summit), however, Thitinan believed that Hatoyama's idea had placed the larger issue of an overarching regional strategy back on the table for discussion, not to mention the fundamental question of how wide, geographically speaking, the region wished to define itself. Thitinan cautioned that even if there would never be a formal East Asia "Community" with a big "C", the U.S. should understand/be prepared for progressive development towards a more informal "community" with a small "c" and engage accordingly. MFA's Suriya stated that ASEAN members looked forward to President Obama's upcoming visit to the APEC and U.S.-ASEAN Summits in Singapore, expecting President Obama could personally articulate the U.S. strategic vision for the region.

#### ASEAN TALKS THE TALK..BUT "REAL" CIVIL SOCIETY WALKS

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**¶5.** (SBU) The Thai ASEAN Chairmanship had been anticipated as an opportunity to initiate a new era of human rights and civil society promotion in the region: a "people-centric ASEAN" had been one of the themes of the Thai ASEAN Chairmanship; the ASEAN Charter was launched at the February summit, and the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was inaugurated at this summit. Unfortunately, the opening day, October 23, represented a regression of sorts from the February summit, because five of the ten ASEAN members refused to meet with civil society members selected at an ASEAN Peoples' Forum earlier in the week from their countries in a dialogue session. Leaders from Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, and, surprisingly, the Philippines all declined to participate in the "Interface Meeting." The civil society organization (CSO) representatives were not given time to speak themselves; only an academic moderator was allowed to summarize issues. Singapore and Burma announced they had designated their own "civil society representatives." Faced with these developments, the representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand opted to walk out of the session, while the delegates from Brunei and Vietnam were reportedly instructed

by their governments to stay.

¶16. (C) Civil society activists, already critical of ASEAN for allegedly watering down a body which will only promote, not protect, human rights, expressed dismay, though some, including Thitinan and Kavi, placed some blame on the civil society representatives as well. Chula's Thitinan, who had led the civil society dialogue in February, in which Burma and Cambodia refused to meet their representatives during the dialogue but successfully negotiated for the remaining reps to abandon a planned sympathy boycott (ref C), said that he regretted that the Thai, Indonesian, and Malaysian reps walked out of the dialogue this time, calling the full result a "fiasco." The Nation's Kavi wished the CSOs had taken a longer "process" view; the civil society engagement process would now "start again at zero" in 2010 under the Vietnamese chairmanship. (note: Vietnamese delegate Tran Thi Thu Thuy told press that an interface meeting with the full participation of APF would be held in Vietnam next year.)

¶17. (C) Sunai Phasuk of Human Rights Watch expressed disappointment that the RTG was not able to sustain the momentum from the summit in February, when PM Abhisit and FM Kasit met with the civil society representatives from Burma and Cambodia after their own governments had refused to do so. He believed the dynamics at the October summit demonstrated that ASEAN was back-tracking and demonstrating its collective discomfort with civil society now that the push to launch the Charter and the AICHR was over.

#### BURMA - WELCOMING U.S. ENGAGEMENT, NOT MENTIONING ASSK

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¶18. (C) Backtracking was in evidence as well in the brief

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mentions of Burma in the Summit statements; gone were the earlier references, issued in Phuket in July and elsewhere, calling for the release of all political prisoners, in favor of a simple statement underscoring the importance of national reconciliation and stressing that the 2010 general election must be conducted in a fair, free, inclusive and transparent manner. Acting Thai Government Spokesperson Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn told us October 26 that Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein had briefed ASEAN plus 3 leaders October 25 on political developments in Burma and Burma's stand on the U.S. policy review on Burma; Thein Sein told the group Burma welcomed the U.S. practical engagement. Dr. Suriya Chindawongse reported that ASEAN leaders briefly talked about Burma, a development Suriya viewed as a positive sign for the dialogue between the U.S. and Burma. Suriya reasoned that with Burma saying the right things about inclusive, free, and fair elections, other countries saw little value in condemning the regime and pushing on political prisoners at this time, leading to the slimmed down Chair language.

¶19. (SBU) In an informal elaboration, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya told the Irrawaddy News that ASEAN would offer to assist the GOB in holding 2010 elections, but Kasit could not say whether an ASEAN electoral team would be approved by the regime. Kasit added that, in his view, the number of political prisoners released by the GOB to date was insufficient and that ASEAN would continue to call for the release of all political prisoners and free and fair elections in 2010.

#### THE THAKSIN FACTOR: HUN SEN ENTERS THE FRAY

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¶10. (C) Any hopes Thai PM Abhisit might have had to relax, unwind and bask in the glow of a successful conference unraveled before most of the heads of state had even travelled to Thailand. Cambodian PM Hun Sen, a reputed business partner of fugitive former Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra, noisily waded into Thai domestic politics on October 23 by inviting former PM Thaksin Shinawatra to travel

to Cambodia, telling reporters: "Thaksin can stay in Cambodia as the guest of Cambodia and also be my guest as my advisor on our economy." Hun Sen went on to compare Thaksin to Aung San Suu Kyi as victims of military junta action, asking: "people talk about Aung San Suu Kyi, why not talk about Thaksin?" The Thaksin-related machinations extended to a second leader: the Sultan of Brunei missed the opening ceremony, reportedly while meeting with Thaksin's relatives at Thaksin's Hua Hin villa, located directly next to the Summit venue.

¶11. (SBU) PM Abhisit reacted swiftly to Hun Sen's provocative rhetoric, calling Hun Sen: "seriously misinformed," before adding: "I don't want him to be a victim or a pawn for someone who undermines the interests of this country. I'm sure when he's better informed he'll change his mind." Seeking to put an end to the war of words -- which received extensive coverage in the Thai domestic media and briefly overshadowed the Summit itself -- PM Abhisit later moved into damage control mode and struck a more conciliatory tone, telling reporters: "I have talked with Hun Sen several times, and he's told me that he's Thaksin's friend, but that he will separate friendship from duty and international affairs. Once Thaksin enters Cambodia, the extradition process will begin. If Cambodia fails to comply (with the treaty), that would be another story."

ENTWISTLE